2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Luke 9:51-62

Today’s reading from Luke call us to be persistent and focused in our efforts to be faithful to God’s call, to be faith-filled disciples of Jesus, to set our faces toward where the Spirit leads. We may have to let go of everyday relationships and common comforts in order to be prepared to encounter the wonders that God has in store for us.1 We may have to open our eyes and hearts and minds ever wider, in order to see God’s new creation breaking forth in our midst. And we may have to step forward in faith, no matter the cost, trusting in God’s faithfulness and love. Such discipleship is not a once in a lifetime event, like baptism. It is not the occasional retreat or day of prayer to revive our drooping spirits. It is not even weekly attendance at Sunday services – as good as that may be. The type of discipleship that we are called to is a way of life, a way of being, a way of interacting with the world around us. Where is God calling you today? How will you respond? In what direction will you set your face?

In today’s Gospel story, we heard that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." He was heading off on that final journey to fulfill his role in God’s great mission of reconciliation. He was returning to the center of Jewish worship to demonstrate worship in truth and in deed. He was headed toward torture, death and new life for the salvation of the world. Because he was focused on following God’s call, the inhospitable reception from the Samaritans didn’t bother him. But he could scold his disciples’ for their wanting to punish the Samaritans. His disciples had obviously forgotten what Jesus had recently taught them: “Love your enemies, …bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you. …” I think Jesus’ rebuke of his disciples was just a slap upside the head to get their attention. He didn’t want them to be distracted by side issues. He wanted them to stay focused.

To one disciple Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Jesus, having turned his face toward Jerusalem, toward his impending passion, death and resurrection, was not concerned with where he would sleep, or what he would eat, or other details of the journey. Jesus remained focused on fulfilling the mission God had called him to and he wanted his disciples to stay focused as well.

Jesus said to another disciple, "Let the dead bury their own dead." I trust that Jesus’ intent for us is not to forsake our families or our obligations, but rather to see them in a new light – to love without making idols of what we love; to nurture without trying to control the outcome; to care for those around us, while abandoning old relationship patterns that stand in the way of God’s purpose.2 Discipleship means fulfilling all our duties and commitments – both civil and religious, both personal and communal – thereby setting our face toward a life of loving service to all.

To a third disciple Jesus said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." If you look backwards while plowing, you may stray into a riverbed or onto an outcropping of rocks or into a field already bursting forth with new growth. If you get distracted from God’s mission, you may miss opportunities to serve, to heal, to console. If you lose focus on what it means to be a disciple, you may not be able to clearly discern the way, the truth, the life – Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

I think the implications from today’s readings are that we should act on God’s call to us today. While we should try to avoid getting sidetracked by everyday anxieties, frustrations, apprehensions - What am I to wear? What am I to eat? Do they really like me? - our perception of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus can be sharpened by current issues such as global warming, random shootings, political debates. In order to be good stewards of the earth, how can we reduce our carbon footprint or our use of plastics? How do we console those who mourn over senseless killings here at home and abroad? And what do we do to try to prevent any more of them from happening? How do we evaluate a politician’s message in light of Jesus’ command to “love one another?”

God is moving through every aspect of our lives, both personal and communal, religious and civil, bringing all the strands together in ways that promote our common health, wholeness, holiness. I believe that each of us is being called to let go of self-centeredness and self-interest, to seek the well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors, both near and far, to not live in the past but to go boldly where the Spirit leads. Such actions will cost us something, But they also will bring us more than we can ever ask or imagine.3 That is Jesus’ promise to us.

So, let us be persistent and focused as we participate in God’s great mission. Let us dare to follow Jesus, without looking back. Let us set our faces toward God’s kingdom come, ere on earth as it is in heaven.

1 http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2013/06/the-adventurous-lectionary-for-june-30-bold-requests-and-challenges/

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.